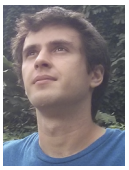
THE "NON-NATURALISTIC FALLACY" IN LAO-ZHUANG DAOISM



Jacob Bender
Philosophy Department, Nanyang Technological University
jacobbender5252@gmail.com

Introduction

The Lao-Zhuang Daoist account of values is grounded in a processual understanding of nature and experience.[1] Building on previous scholarship, I take the Daoist as describing an anti-representational account of experience.[2] The intent of the present study is to clarify how the Daoist understanding of mind and morality is radically naturalistic such that it simultaneously critiques non-naturalistic accounts of values and morality as the source of unnecessary suffering in the world. Drawing on the same spirit as John Dewey's critique of the Western philosophical tradition, I argue that the Daoist understanding of nature would hold that any attempt to isolate qualities from the contexts of which they are unique products would commit an epistemological fallacy—what can be called the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy." The Daoist tradition would claim that qualities are properties of interrelationship and are always context dependent and novel. In other words, *no such quality or "thing" like a good/value/end-in-itself exists*. Furthermore, the Daoist account of nature would also claim that it is actually "non-naturalistic" accounts of value that are the root sources of unnecessary suffering in human society. "Intrinsic value," far from being an assumption necessary for grounding ethical conduct, provides a formula for coercive and oppressive behavior. I conclude by illustrating how this is the case. Although there is more that can be done to help illustrate why and how "intrinsic value" is naturally an oppressive idea,[3] I focus on how the notion helps to justify "any means necessary" conduct such as war. War can only be considered to be of *positive* moral value if the existence of "intrinsic value" is assumed. For the Daoist, war is never a possible means to a morally good end.

Dewey's "Philosophical Fallacy"—Daoism's "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy"

The Daoist account of mind and experience is one that is naturalistic in a way similar to what is found in the works of John Dewey.[4] Like Dewey, the Daoist tradition is perhaps best understood as a critique of fallacious accounts of knowledge and experience that reduce the "meaning" of

© 2021 by University of Hawai'i Press

situations to the language formed about such experience. These misguided beliefs are rooted in a misunderstanding of the relationship between the concepts we form and human experience. The Daoist understanding of nature involves an account of the limits of propositional knowledge, yet this is grounded in a broader understanding of meaningful and intelligible experience.[5] What I hope to illustrate is how the Daoist account of nature provides an account of how *any known or intelligible aspect of experience is internally related to and dependent on the context of which it is a function. There is no such thing as a quality or value "in-itself."* To believe otherwise is to commit the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy"—*the belief that any known "qualities" or "values" exist independent of a natural context*. All perceived "qualities" and "things" of experience have this meaningful structure and *are only knowable and intelligible as functions of the contexts of which they are products*. Although I draw from Dewey's ethical naturalism, it is perhaps best to consider Daoist naturalism as a bit more radical than Dewey's own. Dewey's critique of the Western philosophical tradition is grounded in his radical empiricist account of nature and experience. As Pappas explains,

> Dewey thought that the general failure to be empirical in philosophy amounted to a failure to acknowledge primary experience as the non-cognitive context of philosophical inquiry. Philosophers often denied the practical experiential context of their own investigations and took the products of their inquiries to replace experience as it is lived.[6]

Experience, for Dewey, is not merely cognitive and theoretical in content. The non-cognitive dimensions of experience help to constitute the meaning of any foregrounded aspects of experience. Throughout his later works, Dewey formulates and re-formulates his description of this fallacy, and he never seems to be satisfied with his earlier formulations.[7] In the beginning of *Experience and Nature*, he describes three fallacies in the tradition of philosophy that can be understood as different dimensions of his "philosophical fallacy":

> The three [fallacies] are the complete separation of subject and object, (of *what* is experienced from *how* it is experienced); the exaggeration of the features of known objects at the expense of the qualities of objects of enjoyment and trouble, friendship and human association, art and industry; and the exclusive isolation of the results of various types of selective simplification which are undertaken for diverse unavowed purposes.[8]

Although isolating certain aspects of experience at the expense of others is what constitutes conscious life—that is, *selective emphasis* and the foregrounding of certain relationships is a natural process of consciousness—we mistakenly believe the products of such processes are independent realities when we ignore the way they are embedded in a non-cognitive

context. In a sense, the first two fallacies are derivative of the third as they are simply particular instances of "selective simplification." The "philosophical fallacy" was later formulated as the "analytic fallacy." As Pappas explains, for Dewey "the key to this fallacy is that the rich and concrete context from which distinctions are abstracted is forgotten and the results of inquiry are given a status that they do not and should not have."[9] Any feature of experience that is isolated out of the background continuity of experience is internally related to and constituted by that context. The belief that any "thing" or "quality" is independent of context is simply non-empirical.

Although the Daoist account of nature and experience is similar to Dewey's account, it is possible to restate the Daoist position a bit more clearly by making an even stronger case against the metaphysics and epistemology behind "ethical non-naturalism." G. E. Moore's ethical "non-naturalism" is one such extreme view of knowledge and morality. His "naturalistic fallacy," a position that is rightly criticized by Hilary Putnam as simply a form of Platonism,[10] is a position I take as antithetical to Daoism. Moore's famous claim about the "Good" runs like this:

> 'Good,' then, if we mean by it that quality which we assert to belong to a thing, when we say that the thing is good, is incapable of any definition, . . . and in this sense 'good' has no definition because it is simple and has no parts. It is one of those innumerable objects of thought which are themselves incapable of definition, because they are the ultimate terms by reference to which whatever *is* capable of definition must be defined. . . . [T]here is, therefore, no intrinsic difficulty in the contention that 'good' denotes a simple and indefinable quality.[11]

The first thing to note, and a point I will return to later in this study, is that Moore's "non-naturalism" asserts that "qualities are properties of things." Under this framework, a quality like the "Good" is attributed to a "single thing." The "Good" can only be a "secondary property" of things and not a "primary property." Before it is argued that the "Good" is a quality that is non-natural, assumptions are made about the nature/*being* of "qualities" and "things." As Putnam describes it, Moore's ethical "non-naturalism"

> announced that what ethical judgments are really about is a single, super-sensible quality called *good*. (Moore called it a 'non-natural' quality. Not only is *good* supposed to be invisible to the senses and undetectable by the natural sciences, it is also 'simple,' according to Moore's theory—that is, not analyzable in terms of other properties or qualities. In this respect, it was supposed to be like the color yellow, although (as Moore pointed out) yellow is a natural (in fact a sensible) quality, whereas the allegedly unitary and simple quality of *good* is not.[12]

Moore assumes that some qualities are knowable and intelligible in ways that are "not analyzable in terms of other qualities" and that some qualities are intelligible independent of context. As Mark Johnson describes Moore's views,

> Any attempt to define "good" commits what Moore christened the "naturalistic fallacy," because good is not a natural object or property. Moore notoriously illustrated the notion of a non-natural property with the property yellow, which he claimed we do experience yet which cannot be defined in terms of anything else. Likewise, Moore asserted that good is a property possessed by certain states of affairs that we can experience but not define in terms of any natural properties.[13]

As I intend to outline throughout the remainder of this study, Daoism claims that everything known and made intelligible is done in relation to "some-thing-other"; that is, any known and posited "A" is only knowable and intelligible in relation to the context of which it is an emergent function. Daoists would agree with Johnson when he argues that

> No concept is understood "in itself." Concepts get their meanings in relation to other concepts and to historical situations and frameworks in which the concept develops and gets its temporary application. Concepts grow and change as changing conditions require us to find new ways of ordering and making sense of our experience.[14]

Contrary to Moore, the Daoist account of experience would hold that "yellow" was a "color" and only knowable in the context of its family of resemblances to other "colors." Each "color" is a provisional name denoting a wide variety of various experiences had by human organisms. The color understood as "yellow" is recognized and isolated out of a background of several experiences of "color" and is always initially isolated out of this continuum because of practical concerns.[15] There is no ability to understand "yellow" devoid of context and interrelationship.

The Daoist account of nature goes one step further. "Colors" are not properties of "objects" or "things" nor are they subjective experiences. "Color" is the product of the interaction between the human organism and its environment. It is the unique way the chemistry of this biological organism interacts with waves of light of different frequencies further interacting with different aspects of the environment. To use a Whiteheadian phrase, "color" is not "simply-located."[16] G. E. Moore is simply guilty of Whitehead's "fallacy of simple location" and Dewey's "Philosophical Fallacy." The same thing applies to the quality "good." There is, then, no such thing as a "quality" that is non-natural because every known quality depends on and is an emergent function of a natural, continuous context or "whole." Qualities are properties of interrelationship. Qualities are also not possessed by single "objects" or "subjects." The remainder of this study will

illustrate how the Daoist philosopher's naturalistic account of experience would involve the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy" and how "intrinsic value" provides justification for "any-means-necessary" conduct such as war.

Daoist Philosophy—On Values and Valuing

A central theme in Daoism involves the idea of "returning" attention to the fundamental way humans interrelate with nature. This involves cultivating an accurate understanding of the natural world and our relationship to it. If people do so, then the extraneous suffering that human society creates will be mitigated. The problem is that, for the Daoist, human society and culture encourage the formation of certain habits and beliefs that obfuscate our ability to understand our relationship to nature. Daoists do not insist that persons remove themselves from human society. Daoism diagnoses (what they believe to be) the source of extraneous suffering in human society. Doing so involves understanding and accurately perceiving the natural world. As passage 52 of the *Daodejing* claims,

> Making out the small is real acuity (*ming*), Safeguarding the weak is real strength. Taking into account the way things reveal themselves, If you go back again and rely upon your acuity, You will stay clear of calamities. This is what is called according with common sense.[17]

What the Daoist is suggesting is that if we are not attentive to the natural way we interrelate to the world[18] then we do not accurately perceive the situations we encounter. What is obstructing our experience of situations and how does one return to what is "self-so" (*ziran* 自然)? In the Daoist account, people habitually ignore the *actual process of valuing* nature in favor of abstract "valuation" or the *post facto* "evaluation" *of* certain experiences of valuing; that is, we mistake the second-order evaluation of nature *as* the process of valuing nature itself. "Valuing" is the qualitative way all things are immediately located in relation to the natural world. This is because valuing, as the interaction between various aspects of nature, is always a "primary property" (traditionally, as with Moore, "value" is assumed to be a "secondary property"). To borrow Dewey's term, "valuation" is a secondary (conceptual or "named") aspect of experience and does not exhaustively correspond to the concrete way beings interrelate to the world. "Valuation" is the abstract *evaluation* of concrete experiences of valuing nature. When we commit the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy," this conceptually and provisionally bifurcates nature in such a way that it denies relational connections.[19] Because of the nature of consciousness, it is possible (and, unfortunately, frequently the case) that we neglect the concrete and particular way we are immediately and meaningfully related to the world. Valuing, *in concreto*, always involves the immediately felt quality of experience. The belief that one values abstractions is misguided (like

valuing "The Good"). Furthermore, these same misguided habits and beliefs also end up obstructing the experience of the immediately felt quality of existence; that is, they obstruct attention to those *concrete particulars/things*.

Passage 2 of the *Daodejing* is one of many passages that can be understood as outlining this understanding of values:

> As soon as everyone in the world knows that the beautiful are beautiful, there is already ugliness. As soon as everyone knows the able, there is ineptness. Determinacy (*you*) and indeterminacy (*wu*) give rise to each other.[20]

What the Daoist is diagnosing is the tendency to cling to the abstract or named (*ming* 名) aspects of experience as if the abstractions we produce exhaustively correspond to nature. The Daoist is critical of the tendency to reify qualities in experience as if they were independent of context. Any posited "thing," "quality," or "value" (*you* 有) simultaneously involves the concrete context that it is a *function of*, that is, non-being (*wu* 無). Being (*you*) is the secondary and provisionally posited aspect of experience and nature. Regardless of the kind of evaluation, the posited (*you*) is only meaningful and intelligible in relation to the non-posited (*wu*). As passage 40 of the *Daodejing* claims, "the events of the world arise from the determinate (*you*), and the determinate arises from the indeterminate (*wu*)."[21] A posited "thing" is not separate from the rest of nature. It maintains a connection or "oneness" with the rest of nature because each posited "thing" is a function of a larger whole. All of nature forms an interdependent continuum. The names we give to things and the concepts we form are provisional. We fall into error when we mistakenly believe that nature is constituted by independently existing or ontologically distinct "things."

There are some scholars who consider the *Zhuangzi* to be basic relativism.[22] What these accounts miss is that, traditionally, "values" have been understood as secondary properties of "things."[23] In the Daoist view, "values" are now "primary properties." Both "values" and "things" are not "simply-located." The *Zhuangzi* needs to be understood in a similar naturalistic way as the *Daodejing* passages above. As chapter 2 claims,

> There is no being that is not "that." There is no being that is not "this." But one cannot be seeing these from the perspective of "that": one knows them only from "this" [i.e., from one's own perspective]. Thus, we can say: "That" emerges from "this" and "this" follows from "that." But by the same token, their simultaneous generation is their simultaneous destruction, and vice versa. Simultaneous affirmability is simultaneous negatability, and vice versa. Thus the Sage does not proceed from any one of them alone but instead lets them all bask in the broad daylight of Heaven. And that too is only a case of going by the rightness of the present "this."[24]

This passage expresses that same insight as described in the *Daodejing*. Any posited "value" or "thing" depends on the context or the "non-posited"

aspects of experience. To be clear, each "perspective" is not "right" in a normative sense. The claim that each "knows them only from 'this' perspective" is a descriptive claim about the natural world. It is not an endorsement of each way a perspective provisionally affirms "values" and "things." What is normative in this passage is how the Sage is described. The "Sage does not proceed from any one of them" in the sense that they recognize the natural interdependence and historical contingency of all posited "values" and "things."[25] There is no reason to "proceed from any one of them" because each "non-sage" perspective, insofar as these perspectives do not possess the insights of the Daoist Sage, would all be guilty of the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy." They are positing their "values" as if they were independent of context. As soon as a perspective recognizes the way "values" and "things" are not "simply located," they would be considered a Daoist Sage in the sense that they would not be guilty of the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy." This "Daoist Sage perspective" is one that properly understands the natural interdependence of all "things" and "values."

Another naturalistic account of values in the *Zhuangzi* is introduced through a series of questions in chapter 2 of the Inner Chapters. Although the questions might at first appear to be basic skepticism, there is an ironic answer to many of Zhuangzi's questions. Methodologically, Zhuangzi's questions are often intentionally framed such that the "right" answer to the question is that (ironically) "this question is the wrong question to ask" or "this question presupposes certain kinds of answers and all these answers are wrong." The text playfully highlights how the framing of questions can be "question begging." As the story goes,

> . . . But now let me take a stab at asking you about it. When people sleep in a damp place, they wake up deathly ill and sore about the waist—but what about eels? If people live in trees, they tremble with fear and worry—but how about monkeys? Of these three, which 'knows' the right place to live? People eat the flesh of their livestock, deer eat grass, snakes eat centipedes, hawks and eagles eat mice. Of these four, which 'knows' the right thing to eat? Monkeys take she-monkeys for mates, bucks mount does, male fish frolic with female fish, while humans regard Mao Qiang and Lady Li as great beauties—but when fish see them they dart into the depths. . . .[26]

This story should not be read as mere value skepticism. Biological organisms are related to certain kinds of environments. Furthermore, certain ways of relating to the environment are immediately felt as more valuable. There is a "fit" or "coherence" achieved with certain forms of interactions. For Zhuangzi, there is no dichotomy between fact/value. *Valuing* is how all facts are known; that is, in a processual framework it is impossible to disentangle epistemology from axiology. The point of this passage is that the qualities felt in experience are not "subjective qualities" or "subjective realities."

Qualitative experience emerges as the result of interaction between organism and environment. Asking the question "which perspective is right?" is "question begging" because it assumes the "rightness" is a non-natural and isolatable "quality-in-itself." Keeping this in mind, the lesson of another famous story in the Outer Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* is easier to understand. It is the "happy fish" story and it goes like this:

> Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling along the bridge over the Hao River.
>
> Zhuangzi said, "The minnows swim about so freely, following the openings wherever they take them. Such is the happiness of fish."
>
> Huizi said, "You are not a fish, so whence do you know the happiness of fish?"
>
> Zhuangzi said, "You are not I, so whence do you know I don't know the happiness of fish?"
>
> Huizi said, "I am not you, to be sure, so I don't know what it is to be you. But by the same token, since you are certainly not a fish, my point about your inability to know the happiness of fish stands intact."
>
> Zhuangzi said, "Let's go back to the starting point. You said, 'Whence do you know the happiness of fish?' Since your question was premised on your knowing that I know it, I must have known it from here, up above the Hao River."[27]

Existence is irreducibly communal and shared. There is no "private self" that exists prior to the relationships that constitute experience. "My" experience of the world is constituted by that world. It is always *from "here"* ("this") that I recognize and disclose a world. "Happiness" denotes the particular way the fish is related to a world, and it is not simply a "subjective state." "Happiness" is never completely "private." It is Huizi, the logician/rationalist, who assumes that there is an independent "private inner life" that takes precedence over the way nature is relationally constituted. As Ames claims, "for Zhuangzi, the language itself used to express the event on the bridge is a basis for assuming that there is shared experience between the human beings themselves and with other sentient animals even as remote from us as fish. Zhuangzi, far from putting these two seemingly disparate things together, is registering the depth of their interrelatedness."[28] Experience is primordially interdependent and intersubjective. We fail to bring our attention to the primary aspects of existence (i.e., *valuing*) because we cling to the "names" and concepts that we form about concrete reality.

Both the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* frequently shift from a discussion of values to a discussion of "beings" and *vice versa*. When the relationships between "things" are no longer taken as secondary or "accidental" aspects of experience, this changes how we understand the nature of values. Traditionally, it makes sense to talk about how people possess values. There are dispositions or "things" that we deem to be "good" and favorable and we do so in the sense that these are properties of the objects in question (e.g., healthy food is "good,"

or the "healthy" that is the "good" of the food is thought to be a property of the food). According to this view, values are merely possessed and do not constitute the possessor in question because "things" take precedence over their relationships. As soon as we give up the idea that determinate "things" exist prior to the contingent way said "things" are related, then we can no longer claim that values are "secondary properties" of "things." Values must then, in part, constitute the *being* of the beings under consideration. The "healthy-ness" of food is dependent on both the biology of the organism eating it and the relationship it has to other kinds of food.[29] The value of certain foods is not due to the fact that the food possesses a "quality-in-itself." "Health" as valuable is a dynamic and ongoing interaction with the world.

"Things" do not exist in isolation from the contexts in which they are constituted. As *Daodejing* 11 claims,

> Thirty spokes converge at one hub. But the utility of the cart is a function of the nothingness (*wu*) inside the hub. . . . Thus, it might be something (*you*) that provides the value, But it is [the] nothing[ness] that provides the utility [*yong*].[30]

In a processual account of "things" and "values," it would be correct to equate the two. A "thing" is a function of its context and as such it is a *form of valuing*. Each "thing" is internally related to the context in which it is provisionally posited. Valuing simultaneously constitutes the "things" in question because the interrelationship between a "thing" (*you*) and its context (*wu*) is qualitative. A "quality" is the non-simply located interaction of various aspects of nature. In this sense "value" denotes a much broader domain. A provisionally posited abstract "valuation" is only intelligible in the context of that which has already been *evaluated*. Any isolated "thing" we might claim as "valuable" has been recognized as such only in the background context of our *ongoing and constant valuing* (again, epistemology and axiology are inseparable). The difficulty in clarifying a processual account of "values" is, in a sense, due to the fact that "value" ambiguously denotes both nouns and verbs. We use the same word to denote both "particular values," that is, nouns like "justice" and "freedom" that might be "values I possess," and certain ways of acting, that is, the verbal "we value each other" or "to value their property." Any posited "thing" would then simultaneously be a kind of valuing in the sense that any form of interaction is also a kind of evaluation. Valuing is the dynamic way the continuum of nature is interrelated and transforming. The ability to recognize and posit a "thing" is inseparable from the ability to see its value in a given context. We may point to a being (*you*) as valuable, but it is simply a function of the indeterminate continuum (*wu*) of nature as dynamic and ongoing valuing.

Although it is possible to interpret both the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* as espousing a kind of transcendent mysticism (admittedly, the Daoist religion that later emerges in China goes this route),[31] an

interpretation like this is problematic because it neglects the naturalistic language that runs throughout both the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. Instead of taking the meditation practices as aiming to achieve transcendence, they are better understood as the cultivation of a receptive awareness of the qualitative particularity of nature. The meditation practices of Daoism are an attempt to ameliorate non-naturalistic forms of belief and desire. What they lead to are the insights that are outlined above with the Daoist naturalistic accounts of experience. With these meditation practices we cultivate habits of attention and practice "forgetting" (*wang* 忘) non-naturalistic and reified "knowledge" (*zhi* 知). In so doing, we properly understand the nature of "values" and thereby no longer commit the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy."

The Daoist recognizes that cognitive habits can obstruct our ability to be attentive to natural interdependence. As passage 64 continues, "it is for this reason the sages, in leaving off desiring, do not prize property that is hard to come by, and in studying not to study, *return to what most people have passed over*" (my italics).[32] What "most people pass over" is the immediate way they are interrelated to the natural world. For early Daoism, the ability to see things as they are, unadulterated by preconceived notions (*zhi*), is described using a wide range of vocabulary. There is the positive vocabulary used to describe this cultivated capacity named "clarity" (*ming* 明) and "using clarity" (*yiming* 以明), but most often the Daoist sage is described using a negative vocabulary known as the "*wu*-forms," three of the most important being without-knowledge (無知), without-desire (無欲), and without-action (無為). In early Daoism, clarity means a cultivated, perceptual sensitivity to the concrete particularity of things. The negative vocabulary of the "*wu*-forms," on the other hand, often stresses dimensions of experience no longer directing and obstructing the conduct of the person. When one is "without" these habits of experience, one has cultivated the capacity to perceive the particularity of things (*ziran* 自然). Near the end of the first story of chapter 4 of the Inner Chapters, Confucius as mouthpiece for Zhuangzi suggests that,

> You have learned the wisdom of being ["knowledgeable"—知], but not yet the wisdom of being [free from "knowledge," 無知]. Concentrate on the hollows of what is before you, and the empty chamber within you will generate its own brightness.
>
> Good fortune comes to roost in stillness. To lack this stillness is called scurrying around even when sitting down. Allow your ears and eyes to open inward and thereby place yourself beyond your mind's understanding consciousness.[33]

Daoist sages are "without knowledge" (無知), but this is in the sense that they recognize that cognitive abstractions do not fully correspond to the inexhaustibly novel and changing world we are immersed in. Because they

have cultivated a perceptual capacity to observe the particularity of all things, they are without a fixed understanding of "things" and "values." They are "without knowledge" in the sense that they no longer commit the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy." Cognitive habits no longer obscure experience when attention is returned to the quality of our immediate existence. A Daoist does not literally cultivate a state of mind where all propositional knowledge is abandoned forever. Cognitive habits and propositional knowledge are secondary dimensions of experience. They involve isolating certain features of experience while pushing others to the fringe of consciousness. Maintaining attention solely to the abstract aspects of experience is to spend one's conscious life living ignorantly in one's overactive imagination and conceptualization or, in Zhuangzi's words, to "scurrying around even when sitting down" (*zuochi* 坐馳). Although the phrase is mentioned only once in the entire *Zhuangzi*, it is an accurate and comical way of describing the problems the Daoist philosophers are diagnosing, namely the problems of "propositional knowledge" (*zhi*) and the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy." It describes those persons (philosophers like Huizi) who have never bothered to cultivate the ability to quiet cognitive habits. *Wuzhi* or being "without-knowledge" is a kind of knowing and perceiving that is not merely of the linguistic and cognitive form. *Wuzhi* is the awareness that one's conceptual categories (*zhi*) and the names (*ming*) attributed to "things" are secondary dimensions of experience and do not exhaustively and accurately represent our relation to nature.

Valuing without "Intrinsic Value" in Daoist Philosophy

With the Daoist's naturalistic account of valuing, it is a mistake to think there are such things as "intrinsic values" as this is a misunderstanding of the *being* of "values" and "things." We do not value "values" or "things." Valuing is the quality of interrelationship. On this model, conduct is then adjusted such that *greater valuing, that is, greater degrees of interrelationship*, are achieved.[34] Comparable to Daoism, Dewey's *Theory of Valuation* provides an empirical account of the *concrete valuing* that persons *actually* undergo. Critical of non-naturalistic accounts of value, Dewey claims,

> The extreme instance of the view that to be intrinsic is to be out of any relation is found in those writers who hold that, since values *are* intrinsic, they cannot depend upon *any* relation whatever, and certainly not upon a relation of human beings. . . . The views of this extreme nonnaturalistic school may, accordingly, be regarded as a definite exposure of what happens when an analysis of the abstract concept of 'intrinsicalness' is substituted for analysis of empirical occurrences.[35]

It is impossible, empirically, to value in a way that is free of all relations. As soon as something is valued, it would bear a necessary relationship to

human consciousness and the potential means to attain such a valued "end." The "reasonableness" of any form of valuing depends on the empirical context and the concrete means that are available for achieving the desired ends. When we believe there is such a value "in-itself," we are admitting that the concrete context of experience, the possible means used to achieve such an end, are irrelevant.

We are also, by definition, rejecting the fact that value is a product of relationship. Considering this account of values and the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy," asking about "what transcendent facts/principles guide our valuing" is "question begging" as it assumes that "what" guides conduct needs to be external to the different instances of concrete valuing. Any concrete form of valuing itself is only intelligible and knowable in concrete situations; that is, only lived, concrete experiences of valuing contextualize other concrete forms of valuing. The more experiences of valuing we undergo, the greater the ability one has to adjust to the different ways we can interrelate to the natural world. It is only by interrelating differently to the world that we understand how certain ways of interrelating are more efficacious than others. Without concrete changes in the ways human beings interrelate to and understand their world, there is no "sense" (i.e., "meaning") to how one way of valuing might be more efficacious than others. It should also be clear that this form of naturalism avoids that kind of relativism that would claim that "anything goes" (although that line of argument was perhaps always a "red-herring").

The claim that relativism implies "anything goes" still depends on an account of "values" as "secondary properties" of "things" where "values" either must be merely "subjective realities" or they correspond to a reality that transcends nature. As the Daoist account of nature argues, "values" are always expressions of interdependence and intercommunication. Values say as much about the environment as they do of the valuing persons in question. Certain ways of interrelating to the world are not as valuable as others. This kind of naturalism requires that we maintain attention to the concrete ways in which interrelating to different environments differs in quality. We understand one quality of interrelationship only in relation to the previous felt and undergone modes of interrelating to the world. The more harmonious the interactions with the natural world and our fellow living beings are, the more "value" we realize. With this account of "values" and valuing, there are better and worse ways of valuing and interrelating to the world. Regardless of how the world might end up being constituted (chaotic or peaceful), the best way of dealing with problematic situations is by maintaining attention to the qualitative dimensions of existence.

An "End-in-Itself" is Totalitarian

Critics of Daoism cannot cling to metaphysical assumptions as if these beliefs were what constituted being an ethical human being. From the

Daoist perspective, the belief in "intrinsic values" is not only contradictory, it involves the neglect of important features of situations that are needed for being a moral human being. An "end" or "good-in-itself," far from being necessary for ethics, is a belief that is oppressive. The distinction between "intrinsic value" and "instrumental value" provides the justification for totalitarian, unilateral, "any means necessary" conduct. Conduct that neglects the means used to achieve "valued ends" is not ethical. Those familiar with the *Daodejing* would likely have recognized another important theme in the work: its "anti-war" position. The Daoist's "anti-war" position makes sense once "intrinsic value" is recognized as necessary for justifying war as a means to a "valued end." For the Daoist, war is never a means to a *positive* morally good end. As *Daodejing* 31 claims,

> Military weapons are inauspicious instruments, and so when you have no choice but to use them, it is best to do so coolly and without enthusiasm. Do not glorify weapons, for to do so is to delight in killing people, and anyone that delights in killing people will come up short in the world. . . . When the casualties are high, inspect the battleground with grief and remorse; when the war is won, treat it as you would a funeral.[36]

Although Daoists are against war, they do not argue for complete pacifism. If another state is attempting to take human life, self-defense and the preservation of life are conduct that can still help to minimize suffering. Although there are possible situations where there is no choice but to use military weapons, war undertaken in any form is never of *positive* moral value. This is why the *Daodejing* suggests that even in victory we should still treat such victory like a funeral. War might be the "lesser of two evils" but it always involves the extinguishing of valuable interrelationships. Properly understanding the implications of war requires understanding how even self-defense and the preserving of one's own life do not compensate for the value loss due to war. It is for this reason that the Daoist would never hold the idea that victory in war could be celebrated. War ends valuable interrelationships. The killing of any animal drastically reduces the capacity for such animals to realize and create valuable relationships. The idea that war could be a means to a "greater good" is, for the Daoist, morally repugnant.[37] The idea that war can lead to a "greater good" is just an example of how metaphysical beliefs can be appropriated to justify great levels of violence and suffering.

It is necessary to assume that there exists an "intrinsic value" in order to justify the idea that war can produce *positive* moral value. When a philosopher mentions the phrase an "end-in-itself" and conflates it with "intrinsic value," it is in fact being borrowed from a metaphysical tradition that has passed over blatant contradictions. There are two senses of what it can mean to be an "end-in-itself." In one sense, it emphasizes the "end" in the means/end relationship. An "end-in-itself" is the final, highest, most

complete "end" of a process (e.g., a "final cause"/*telos*). It is the valued "end" that is not the means to a further valued "end" (i.e., it no longer has "instrumental value"). The other sense is how Kant uses the term. Kant is looking for a "thing" that has "value" that is "intrinsic," in other words an *essence* that, regardless of the relationship it may contingently possess, will remain unchanged. For Kant, an "end-in-itself" is no longer simply a temporal "end." Kant's use of the phrase focuses primarily on the "essential" and "intrinsic" aspects of the notion.

What Kant defines as an "end-in-itself" (a rational being) is precisely that which is problematized by Dewey in a *Theory of Valuation*:

> The words 'inherent,' 'intrinsic,' and 'immediate' are used ambiguously, so that a fallacious conclusion is reached. Any quality or property that actually belongs to any object or event is properly said to be immediate, inherent, or intrinsic. The fallacy consists in interpreting what is designated by these terms as out of relation to anything else and hence as absolute. For example, *means* are by definition relational, mediated, and mediating, since they are intermediate between an existing situation and a situation that is to be brought into existence by their use.[38]

Regardless of the kind of valuing, value is immediately felt (in the process of successfully using a tool—for example, you immediately recognize its value. Instrumental value is intrinsic to the process of using a tool). An end is always related to the means used. In the temporal sense, simply by definition, means *must* be used to achieve any desired end. When philosophers confuse the notions of "intrinsic-ness" and "finality," they establish an *illegitimate hierarchy* that justifies oppression. This is due to the distinction between "intrinsic" and "instrumental" value. "Intrinsic value" assumes the disregard of "instrumental value." Since "intrinsic value," as *sui generis*, transcends "instrumental value" in the sense that "instrumental value" can never change the value of "intrinsic value," the achieving of "intrinsic value" legitimizes any means necessary. The structure of an "end" or "value-in-itself" is intrinsically (tautologically) oppressive. Dewey makes this point regarding an "end-in-itself" brilliantly in his *Theory of Valuation*:

> The conception involved in the maxim that 'the end justifies the means' is basically the same as that in the notion of ends-in-themselves; indeed, from a historical point of view, it is the fruit of the latter, for only the conception that certain things are ends-in-themselves can warrant the belief that the relation of ends-means is unilateral, proceeding exclusively from ends to means.[39]

Dewey then claims that there are two "rationalizations" that can be used to defend the logic behind the notion of an "end-in-itself":

> One of the views is that only the specially selected 'end' held in view will actually be brought into existence by the means used, something miraculously intervening to prevent the means employed from having their other usual

> effects; the other (and more probable) view is that . . . [an] arbitrary selection of some one part of the attained consequences as *the* end and hence as the warrant of means used (no matter how objectionable are the *other* consequences) is [that] the fruit of holding *it*, as *the* end, is an end-in-itself, and hence possessed of 'value' irrespective of all its existential relations. And this notion is inherent in *every* view that assumes that 'ends' can be valued apart from the appraisal of the things used as means in attaining them.[40]

Contrary to the traditional account by philosophers, an "end-in-itself" as a temporal "end" is related to both (1) the means that can be utilized to achieve the desired end and (2) the "possessor" of such valued "ends." A "good-in-itself" or *eudemonia* is an example of an "end" in the temporal sense. It is an "end" in the sense of finality and completeness. No other "value" exists higher than the "highest end." The "intrinsic-ness" of a temporal "end-in-itself" is attributed to its "finality." It is complete, and when it is complete it is unchanged by any further "accidental relations." When trying to maintain this idea of "intrinsic-ness" the philosopher needs to neglect that such an "end' is only realizable due to related means. The problem is that philosophers make the fallacious leap from taking an "end" as "final" and "complete" to assuming that it was also *ahistorical*. Their (fallacious) logic runs like this: as "final" it is assumed to have "intrinsic" and thus *superior* value. As "final," all future relations would then be mere "accidents" (a tautology). Therefore (fallaciously), all previous relations (*means utilized*) must also be mere "accidents." If not, then the definition of the "highest end" as "intrinsically good" *might be suspect*.

When an "end" is taken to be "intrinsically good," to maintain this position the philosopher takes the next fallacious step in negating the history that was required for such a "good" to be achieved. An "end-in-itself," by definition, is of more value than anything that is "instrumentally" or "accidentally" valuable. The value of such an "intrinsically valuable end" does not require us to consider the means that are utilized to achieve such an "end." If any means help us reach a "highest end," they were *merely accidental realities anyway*. The other "ends" that are brought about, simply by virtue of being merely "accidental," would never adulterate the "intrinsic value" of such a self-defined "end-in-itself." When "intrinsic value" is conflated into the notion of an "end-in-itself," we have the necessary formula for justifying war, carelessness, and domination all in one. Committing the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy" bifurcates the world into two sets of values. "Intrinsic value," as by definition unchangeable due to historically contingent relationships, provides the justification for separating means and ends into a dualism. This itself provides the foundation for justifying "any means necessary" conduct. With this processual and naturalistic account of values, the values of means and ends are always interdependent. As such, war is never a viable means to a *positive* morally valuable end.

Conclusion

The Daoist understanding of experience provides a naturalistic account of values. Experience and knowledge are both irreducibly relational for Daoist philosophers as well as for Dewey. Valuing is the way some aspects of experience are related to others. When we do not recognize how values emerge from the interaction between environment and organism, we can be said to commit the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy." This Daoist account of nature and experience simultaneously re-diagnose the occurrence and sources of suffering in human society. We, by the very act of taking values as independent of context and environment, neglect the immediate way that values are a product of interrelationship. Regardless of whether a situation is chaotic or harmonious, there are more valuable ways that experience can be adjusted such that more holistic and valuable interrelationships can take place. If we are mindful of this, then the amount of extraneous suffering introduced into human society due to certain non-natural and metaphysical beliefs will be lessened. Conduct that is shaped merely by the secondary and cognitive dimensions of experience *ipso facto* neglects the non-cognitive context that gives the cognitive aspects of experience their meaning. It is for this reason that the Daoist insists we "forget" certain habits of belief and desire. Far from being a belief necessary to be an ethical human being, "intrinsic value" helps to justify suffering and carelessness. In particular, "intrinsic value" is an idea that justifies war as a viable means to a morally good end. For the Daoist, war only extinguishes valuable relationships. We are simply better off "forgetting" such metaphysics. In doing this, we can be said to have cultivated dispositions such that the perception of situations and "things" no longer commits the "Non-Naturalistic Fallacy."

Notes

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Shuchen Xiang for their helpful comments on this essay.

1 – There are some scholars who find the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* to be presenting two different philosophical positions. Although there are clearly differences in the style and in some of the philosophical content of the two texts, one point I take as common to them both is their naturalism, that is, a non-essentialist, anti-foundational account of nature and values. There are examples in both texts that can be cited as evidence against a naturalist reading (e.g., the descriptions of the Daoist sage in chapter 1 of the *Zhuangzi* could suggest that the Daoist sage transcends nature). The "monistic" and "mystical" dimensions can, however, be explained through a processual and naturalist account of these texts (I attempt to do this a bit at end of this study).

What I am calling the "Lao-Zhuang Philosophical" position is, in another sense, a possible way to read these texts from the Chinese Chan Buddhist perspective. The *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, using Chan Buddhism as a frame of reference, are easier to interpret as philosophically anti-foundational and naturalistic.

2 – See Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference*, pp. 50–57, for Ziporyn's summary of Hansen's and other's views of Chinese Philosophy as generally anti-representational.

3 – For example, the idea of "intrinsic value" was used as a justification for both racism and sexism/patriarchy in the west. Only "white men" had intrinsic value. At best, women and non-whites could be of "instrumental value" similar to animals and nature. The present essay is arguing that "intrinsic value," as an assumption, is (1) formulaically oppressive and (2) not necessary in any case. Fortunately, there has been terrific work already spelling out some of these implications. As Shuchen Xiang argues in her paper "Chinese Processual Holism and Its Attitude Towards 'Barbarians' and Non-Humans," the processual nature of Chinese metaphysics has implications for the epistemological taxonomizing of the natural world. "Things" are not understood to have discrete boundaries, and this has the moral implication that there are no "subpersons" who are beyond the boundaries of moral concern. An idea like "race," as understood in the West, is really not a possibility in a processual framework.

4 – For this study, when I use the term naturalism I draw primarily on Mark Johnson's account of naturalism in *Morality for Humans*. Johnson's account draws from the works of John Dewey. In another terrific account of naturalism in Chinese philosophy, Jeeloo Liu differentiates her understanding of Naturalism from what is called "Scientific Naturalism":

> [N]aturalism adopts a humanistic perspective, and argues that the scope and significance of our ontology should be related to creatures like us. It is termed "Humanistic Naturalism," and it centers on humans and their values, capacities, and conceptions in the way it defines Nature. This view takes nature and humans' attitudes toward nature as essentially intertwined. (See Liu, "In Defense of Chinese Qi-Naturalism," p. 37)

Although the two works are not identical, they do share a similar desire to see naturalism with respect to the human subject. In concluding, Liu takes it that a kind of "neutral monism" is the metaphysics required for grounding the naturalism of Qi cosmology. As I will argue below, I take Chinese cosmology to be radically processual and pluralistic in ways similar to Ames and Hall, who draw on Dewey and Whitehead.

5 – Youru Wang, in *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism*, describes a similar position. He argues that Zhuangzi is interested in "Liminology" or the study of the limits of language and, by extension, knowledge and experience. Although Daoist Philosophy is in many ways different from Kantian Philosophy, Zhuangzi's project is Kantian in the sense that it is concerned with the limits of language or the "bounds of possible experience." The *Zhuangzi* is not simply espousing "skepticism." It takes issue with the nature of experience and what lies within and beyond the bounds of possible experience. The account I provide below is one that draws on Dewey's account of aesthetic meaning.

6 – Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics*, p. 26.

7 – See Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics*, chap. 1, for a nice summary of the different ways the "philosophical fallacy" has been framed and named throughout Dewey's works.

8 – Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 32.

9 – Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics*, p. 26.

10 – Putnam, *Ethics Without Ontology*; generally see pp. 17–19.

11 – Moore, *Principia Ethica*, pp. 9–10.

12 – Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, p. 18.

13 – Johnson, *Morality for Humans*, p. 19.

14 – Ibid., p. 173.

15 – See Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, for his account of Zhuangzi and ontological relativism.

16 – For an account of the fallacy of the "simple location" and the fallacy of "misplaced concreteness" see Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, pp. 48–49, 51.

17 – Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant*, p. 158.

18 – For other accounts of Daoist Philosophy as describing an "interdependent self," see Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference*; Lai, *Learning from Chinese Philosophies*; and Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*.

19 – This particular insight is, in part, indebted to comments by one of my blind reviewers.

20 – Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant*, p. 80.

21 – Ibid., p. 139.

22 – For example, Ziporyn and Hansen have both argued that the *Zhuangzi* presents a form of relativism. See both Ziporyn's "How Many Are the Ten Thousand Things and I?" and Hansen's "Guru or Skeptic? Relativistic Skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*," in Scott Cook, ed., *Hiding the World in the World*.

23 – Traditional "relativism" would hold that for whatever is "relative," it is a property of a "single thing"; that is, what was "relative" was merely a "secondary property" and also "simply locatable." If we take relationships as "primary properties," then the relationships say as much about the particular contexts as they do about the other provisionally isolated "things." Quality is produced by the interactions between various aspects of nature. There are, in other words, particular "objective conditions" that must be brought about for an interaction even to take place. We can empirically study what sorts of qualities emerge from concrete interactions.

24 – Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, p. 12.

25 – Although there have been numerous accounts of the "perspectivism" of Zhuangzi, see Lai, *Philosophy and Philosophical Reasoning in the Zhuangzi*. Her account also draws the distinction between "great wisdom" (*dazhi*) and "little wisdom" (*xiaozhi*) in the *Zhuangzi*. I take this distinction to claim that although there are different perspectives and that all perspectives are "embedded" in historical interdependence, we can still stay that some perspectives are better. "Great wisdom" means that one properly understands the nature of "values."

26 – Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, p. 18.

27 – Ibid., p. 76.

28 – Ames, "'Knowing' as the 'Realizing of Happiness' Here, on the Bridge, over the River Hao," p. 283.

29 – For example, if you eat one kind of healthy food "x" and eat only this kind of food, there is a good chance that you will become ill. Its value is always related to the other foods that play a role in one's diet. The quantity of food that the biological organism is eating also plays a role as well. "Health" and "good health" are not "simply-located."

30 – Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant*, p. 91.

31 – See Scott Cook, ed., *Hiding the World in the World*, for other authors who argue that Daoism is a form of "monistic mysticism."

32 – Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant*, p. 178.

33 – Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, p. 27, with my amendments. In part, these amendments were made thanks to some of the

comments by one of my blind reviewers. "Wisdom" and "knowledge," in this context, are different for the Daoist.

34 – If each interaction produces values/qualities, then more interactions produce more values. An easy example to think about is human relationships. Relationships among humans are not always one-dimensional. We can be interrelated in many different ways to each other simultaneously. Relationships that are more valuable involve interacting in emotional, intellectual, and somatic ways combined.

35 – Dewey, "Theory of Valuation," p. 216.

36 – Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant*, p. 125.

37 – See Behuniak's article, "John Dewey and the Virtue of Cook Ding's Dao." In reference to both Mencius and Zhuangzi, he claims "Each thinker agrees that the strict imposition of 'external' (*wai*) ends on activity does 'positive harm.' Dewey would not hesitate to call such harm 'evil.'" Although further clarifying this would go far beyond the scope of the present essay, I take it that there would be much agreement between this account of Daoist naturalism that I have provided and Behuniak's work juxtaposing Dewey and Zhuangzi. To add to Behuniak's account, we could say that imposing an "end-in-itself" as "intrinsically valuable" supplies a justification for "anything goes" conduct.

38 – Dewey, "Theory of Valuation," p. 214.

39 – Ibid., p. 228.

40 – Ibid.

References

Ames, Roger T. 2015. "'Knowing' as the 'Realizing of Happiness' Here, on the Bridge, over the River Hao." In *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, edited by Takahiro Nakajima and Roger T. Ames. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Ames, Roger T., and David Hall, trans. 2003. *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Behuniak, James. 2010. "John Dewey and the Virtue of Cook Ding's Dao." *Dao* 9, no. 2 (June 2010): 161–174.

Cook, Scott, ed. 2003. *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Dewey, John. 1958. *Experience and Nature*. New York: Dover Publications.

———. 1984. "Theory of Valuation." In *The Later Works of John Dewey*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 13, pp. 189–252. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Hall, David L., and Roger T. Ames. 1998. *Thinking From the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Hansen, Chad. 1992. *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2003. "Guru or Skeptic? Relativistic Skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*." In *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, editd by Scott Cook. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Johnson, Mark. 2014. *Morality for Humans: Ethical Understanding from the Perspective of Cognitive Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lai, Karyn. 2006. *Learning from Chinese Philosophies: Ethics of Interdependent and Contextualised Self*. Ashgate World Philosophies Series. Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

———. 2006. "Philosophy and Philosophical Reasoning in the 'Zhuangzi': Dealing with Plurality." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33, no. 3:365–374.

Liu, Jeeloo. 2015. "In Defense of Chinese Qi-Naturalism." In *Chinese Metaphysics and Its Problems*, pp. 33–53. Cambridge University Press.

Moore, G. E. 1903/1968. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pappas, Gregory Fernando. 2008. *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Putnam, Hilary. 2004. *Ethics Without Ontology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wang, Youru. 2003. *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism: The Other Way of Speaking*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.

Whitehead, Alfred North. 1925. *Science and the Modern World*. New York: Macmillan.

Xiang, Shuchen. 2020. "Chinese Processual Holism and its Attitude Towards 'Barbarians' and Non-Humans." *Sophia: International Journal of Philosophy and Traditions*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-020-00781-w.

Ziporyn, Brook. 2003. "How Many Are the Ten Thousand Things and I?" In *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*. Edited by Scott Cook. Albany: State University of New York Press.

———, trans. 2009. *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

———. 2012. *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought: Prolegomena to the Study of Li*. Albany: State University of New York Press.